

Accompanying
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The last several nights we've been talking about our lives as walking on a road that we make by walking. Walking on a road that unfurls under our feet through the vastness. We've also talked about the ways in which we are accompanied as we walk along that road unfurling from out beneath our feet. Tonight I would like to talk a little bit about the ways we accompany, and maybe a bit about ways for us to be good companions to others on the way.

So pilgrims, let us start our journey.

In our habitual minds, in the place where thoughts and feelings seem like things that we have to do something about, they appear and we have this idea that we should respond with some activity. It can be something as simple and subtle as watching them rise and fall, and it can move quickly into delving into them or suppressing them, or trying to understand them or projecting them on to somebody else or writing them down or remembering them for later or making a plan about them. In this habitual mind we are very busy. We spend a lot of time moving our thoughts and feelings around and reacting to them in various ways. In fact, you could spend a whole lifetime doing that.

It is often partly a dissatisfaction with that state of affairs that brings us to meditation. We discover, as we spend some time sitting in the silence, that that mind in which thoughts and feelings are things we have to react to, begins to change as time passes and things get stiller and wider and deeper. Perhaps we find that that busy self managing all those thoughts and feelings is slowly changing into something else, which begins to feel a bit more like a field. The thoughts and feeling arise and fall in that field. We can watch what happens. Then we begin to notice that that field is not only inside ourselves but continuous inside to outside. It's not bounded by our skulls or by our skin.

We begin to notice over time that other things rise and fall in that field, too. Someone appears before us. Other creatures appear before us. Circumstances rise and other ones fall away. If we stay with that over time we begin to notice that our thoughts and feeling don't quite seem to feel so personal anymore. They seem like things rising and falling in the field

along with everything else. Sometimes we can even forget why it was we should give them particular pride of place or be particularly concerned about them.

So then, perhaps we begin to notice that this field of awareness isn't something we're even located in. Somehow we have become it ourselves. That busy self, managing thoughts and feelings, has become instead a kind of warm intelligence that suffuses the field, and there are all these other things with their warm intelligences also suffusing the field. We go outside and walk around in this beautiful landscape, and we begin to feel the warm intelligence of the rocks and the places where ours meet theirs, and the places where it's pretty hard to tell where ours stop and theirs begins. We begin to see the field as made up of the confluence of all those warm intelligences. And the thing about that field is that it is as big as you will allow it to be. It will include as much as you let it. It itself has no natural boundaries at all.

When we hang out in that field, we begin to notice certain qualities about it. I wanted to talk about just a couple of those qualities tonight. One is something we might call patience. And after all, why not? It's an eternal field; it might as well be patient. If you don't like what's happening this minute, this year, or this *kalpa*, stick around. It will change. In talking about compassion last night, we said that patience isn't static or passive, and it is not about being calm. It's a willingness to hang out, a willingness to wait and see, a willingness not to turn away. It has its own warmth towards life, its own interest and concern about everything in the field.

It's a process rather than a thing. Sometimes when we are patient we discover how agitated we are. Sometimes when we are patient we find we are really uncomfortable. And so patience, as when we were talking about compassion last night, is about being willing to be uncomfortable, being willing to allow life to be exactly as it is and not to turn away.

I wanted to talk a little bit about compassion, which is a word I see lying on a gurney in the I.C.U. hooked up to machines and just about dead. It's become so abstract and so idealized that I'm not even sure we know what it means anymore. I'd like to talk about some bloody aspects of compassion. You know, gritty, bony aspects of it. The idealization of compassion is that we need to immediately and completely feel perfect empathy with whatever is presented before us, with the person who is suffering. My experience is that we can't always do that.

I know there are things I don't feel immediate, perfect, complete empathy with. I know that sometimes my first reaction is *Get a grip*. As we were saying last night, *Stop hitting yourself in the head with that hammer and complaining of a headache*. And sometimes it's *Ah! I really wanted to sleep tonight*. *This again*, you know? It seems to me we enter on the path of compassion when we're willing to stay up, even though we wanted to sleep that night, and hang out with what's going on even if we don't feel completely empathetic with it. It's our willingness to show up, to not turn away. It's our willingness to hold even our lack of understanding provisionally, to stay open to the idea that that might change. It might take years, but it might change. We're willing to wait and see.

Compassion means suffering with. Often we take that to mean experiencing what the other person is experiencing. But I'm beginning to wonder if it means being willing to suffer what we're suffering in the face of whatever is happening.

When I call into my mind people who recruit children to be suicide bombers or people who want to turn America into an imperial power, I don't feel empathy. I do not have an immediate understanding of what that's about or why people would do such a thing. That is my suffering in the face of what is happening. To me, compassion more and more is becoming about the willingness to suffer what I suffer, to suffer my discomfort, my not-understanding, my pain, in the face of things, and just stay with that and not turn away.

One of the things we discover about this field of awareness, this field of warm intelligence, is that it does seem to have these deeply hearted qualities : patience, compassion, and a kind of kindness. Kindness is not the same as niceness. Kindness is a really, really hard practice. Let me just touch on a couple of the aspects of hard kindness practice.

One thing about it is realizing that whatever is going on, if you are involved, it somehow belongs to you. It must in some way be your fate because there you are. In the immortal words of Issan Dorsey, "We get what we deserve whether we deserve it or not." A beginning of kindness seems to be a willingness to look at that, consider that, and take that on.

Another part of it is the times when we realize that things have gotten tangled beyond anything we can untangle. There isn't anything we can do about it. And there is a kindness in understanding our own limitations in the situation. Not continuing to try past when it is kind to try. Then the next thing about it is that if we stop trying past when it's kind to try, to again

stay open to the possibility that that will change. There may come a time in the future when the knot tied in the light can be untied in the dark.

In the meantime while we are waiting for the possibility that things might change and knots might become unraveled, the next thing is that we take up the Way of What Is Happening. We take up the practice of someone being furious at us. We take up the practice of deep disappointment in life. We take up the practice of the unfairness of those things. That's hard, but it's kind. And if we can do that, if we can hold that as our practice, it can be tremendously clarifying and purifying.

None of this is static. All of it is engaged. All of it has a kind of warmth to it, a curiosity and interest in life. A willingness to roll up our sleeves and plunge our hands in, ask questions, to wait, to wonder, to stay open, or consider that which is difficult. To not know and not turn away when we don't.

There is a quality here of the heart that is broken open; the not-turning-away heart that is sundered and stays open in some way to the world. The heart that sees that we live most of our lives in dappled light. Mostly the sunlight is filtered through the leaves of the trees, and it falls on us in patches of light and patches of dark. There are times in our lives when we enter a meadow and everything is brilliantly sunny for a while. And there are times in our lives when we are in a deep part of the forest full of shadows, where no sunlight falls at all. But always at some point we return to the dappled light, and that is where we walk.

To see that, to understand that deeply about life, that it is light and it is dark. To try to separate light and dark and make good and bad creates bitterness. To see that is a kindness. To accept that as the way things are doesn't prevent us from asking the next question, which is *And now what? Where do we go from here?* But we ask that question from the position of the way things actually are. Not from how we think they ought to be or how we wish they were or how we're afraid they are. It is kinder to ask the questions *Now what? Where do we go from here?* from the position of the way things actually are.

We look into the faces of the people we love and we see that they are dappled. They are light and they are dark. We look down at our own hands and we see the ways they have healed and the ways they have hurt, what they have created and what they have destroyed. To know that, to accept that, to ask *And now what?* — that is the great kindness.

Sometimes we are in this quantum field where things rise and fall and everything is tangled up together. It's unbearably tender and beautiful. Sometimes it feels, even after we have been doing this a long time, that we have a descent out of that quantum field onto a Newtonian pool table where everything is blocky and sharp. And these blocky and sharp billiard balls go careening off of each other and smash into each other.

It's easy to think that the quantum field where everything is unbearably tender and beautiful all tangled up together is the real thing, and that the fall on to the Newtonian pool table is some kind of error, some kind of mistake, something we need to fix. But the truth is that both of those things, the field and the pool table, exist simultaneously, completely intertwined, completely inseparable. The field is always there. It gives rise to the pool table, completely, wholeheartedly. And in this case, no mistake.

Perhaps in the most profound way that is what our practice is about. It's the integration of those two things, living simultaneously without split in the quantum entangled field and the blocky and sharp Newtonian pool table. Allowing our meditation and the deepest things we learn from meditation to completely stain our lives, and also allowing our lives to completely stain our meditation.

We can have very deep meditation experiences, we can understand a lot, have read a lot of books, and know how to do all the forms perfectly, but if we're not kind it comes to nothing. In meditation we develop insight that is a clarity that comes from certain kinds of experiences. But it is our kindness that makes us wise. It is when the clarity that comes out of those meditation experiences meets our open, broken heart and the patience and the compassion there, that we discover kindness, that we become wise. Wisdom is warm. It's interested. Wisdom has open hands.

Let me close with a last thought about practicing alone and practicing together. Last year a fourteen-year-old I'm close to went to Paris for the first time. A girl after my own heart : All her classmates were shopping in the boutiques and she snuck out to go visit the cathedral of Notre-Dame. When she told me about standing in Notre-Dame for the first time, I could remember standing in Notre-Dame for the first time, and the tremendous beauty. Those cathedrals in Europe are beautiful because they built them beautiful. But they are also beautiful because for hundreds and hundreds of years people have come into them and prayed and done ceremonies. The very stone walls are filled with incense. The stone floors are worn

smooth down the middle with millions of feet having walked on them. The pews are paler and dented from millions of bottoms and millions of knees on the kneelers. And that makes them unutterably beautiful.

In our Way, in our practice, we don't live inside the cathedral; the cathedral lives inside of us. That cathedral is made of our breath, our meditation, the ways our breath connects with that wind that has been blowing since before the beginning of time, and the ways we connect with each other. It's made of our cooking and of our singing. The sacrament of that cathedral, which is never any further away than the next breath, is kindness. It doesn't require so much as a wafer, let alone a fatted calf — just open hands. It can be performed anywhere, this sacrament, on the street corner and in kitchens. It is always there. It is completely portable.

When we are kind, when we put our kindness out into the field, something happens and it turns around and comes back into our meditation and makes us wiser. And around and around that goes — wisdom and kindness, inhale and exhale — wherever we are, whatever we're doing within that cathedral we carry inside us always.

Let me borrow an idea from a colleague of mine that some of you will recognize. Niceness involves 'impression management.' That's when you are trying to make somebody else think something about you. Kindness is this warm intelligence toward the field, an interest and curiosity in things. It's not so personal. Simply, first, not to turn away from it, not to try to impression-manage. Not to try to think of all the reasons it's not true, *But wait, there's another side to this story; But wait, it's so unfair.* To really stay with what it feels like to have someone absolutely enraged at you. To just sit in the fire, and then what happens is individual, it will be particular to you. It's really something to do that without trying to defend at all against it, not trying to change it or fix it, but accept that that fire is raging.

That's the really big question. People have all kinds of metaphors for that — you know, that it's God looking at God. It's the biggest mystery of all. The physicist David Bohm talks about the universe that we can see, which is pretty big, the universe that we are aware of out there, is like bubbles of foam floating on the surface of the waves, and underneath them is this ocean that goes down to infinity. That's everything we can't see and can't know. Why there should be this little sunlit crust of bubble on the top of that wave I cannot imagine. I cannot imagine. But it is beautiful to me that it is thus. Another big part of our practice is not to turn

away from the mystery of things. To hold that we can't know. We cannot know. It is thus. And as I say that I feel happy. I feel happy not to know because what I don't know is really big.